

[Samurzakani]

Religious Beliefs and Practices

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the silver thread which is lowered into the water. The ceremony lasts until the skin will no longer swell. That means the soul is caught in the skin. Then the skin's mouth is tied with the thread and brought to the relatives of the drowned man, who, after having redeemed the soul, on the same day release it through a hole made for that purpose into the grave in order that it may be re-united with the body. More than once the soul-catchers have complained to the local justice because they did not receive the payment promised them. If the accused refused to pay on the pretense that although the soul of their relative was caught but the whole of it was not delivered to them, while the soul-catchers proved that they had delivered the entire soul, in such circumstances the wise judge, in order to satisfy both sides, would solve the case according to popular custom by forcing both sides to take the oath as to the truthfulness of their words. 775 691

This custom is especially interesting to note because of its legal character. When the swollen and tied-up skin-bag, which is supposed to contain the soul of a drowned person, is delivered by the soul-catchers to the relatives of the deceased, the latter are obliged to pay the fee fixed beforehand for the work of catching the soul. If they refuse to pay, the offended party resorts to the law of custom, according to which the justice settles the dispute.

Parallel with this custom among the Georgians of Samurzakani regarding the soul of a drowned person is a similar belief among the Georgians of the Telav District, Department of Tiflis.⁸² They believe that "the souls of drowned persons are taken in possession by evil spirits, and in order to free the soul it is necessary to kill a goat on the bank of the river where he was drowned and throw the bleeding animal into the water with these words: 'Here is a goat for you; free the drowned man!'" 775

The funeral ceremonies which accompany the burial of a dead person and the special commemorative celebrations which are arranged at certain periods thereafter consist of customary procedures which are followed and executed by the people with minute exactness and have the same aim: to feed and comfort the dead. 764

⁸² Stepanov: 82.

[See cat. 116, p. 48 -- Analysis]